

The Week

A NEWS ANALYSIS FOR SOCIALISTS
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VIETNAM:
“PROTESTS
EVERYWHERE
I GO”
—WILSON

FIGHT AGAINST REDUNDANCY

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Volume 9, Issue 1, February 1988, \$6.00

REDUNDANCY AGAINST FIGHT

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FIGHT REDUNDANCY

The growing tendency of monopolisation is leading directly to closures of factories all over the country. If these closures are accepted without resistance whole sections of the working class will face unemployment at the worst, and a much lower standard of living at the best. The employers will arrange things so that militant sections of the trade union movement are weakened by these changes.

It is the responsibility of the whole movement to fight redundancy in the interests of the trade union movement. It is a welcome development that workers at A.E.I. factories are to generalise their fight. It is significant that they have called for the nationalisation of their industry. Left to themselves each section of workers that faces closures will be defeated. Even the strike weapon is relatively ineffective because the employers are not so bothered about maintaining production in units that are due to close anyway. The fight, therefore, needs generalising and needs giving a political aspect.

Programmes for each industry which is faced with this threat need drawing up. Of particular importance is the drive to link up shop stewards committees and union branches in this struggle. This week's conference at Seymour Hall could play a role in helping to consolidate links and set up committees to achieve these ends. We wish them every success in this endeavour.

WILSON'S LAMENT

A little reported passage in Wilson's television speech in America gave a clue to effects of the anti-Vietnam war movement. Explaining the feelings of the British people on Vietnam he exclaimed "everywhere I go I find people demonstrating against the Vietnam war." Harold Wilson drew the conclusion from this that he should continue to support Johnson. We should force him to draw a different conclusion.

We should ensure that everywhere Wilson goes he finds demonstrations which insist that he reverse his policy of supporting Johnson. He should be put in the position where he has to adopt the stratagem of Johnson in going from place to place in helicopter. This very fact would make a basic change to the British political scene. It is no little thing when the political leader of a country cannot go about the land without being in fear of demonstrators. We should make Wilson's life as difficult as possible. We can start to do this on February the 23rd when he will be at Lambeth Town Hall. All readers of the Week should ensure that as many people as possible turn up to give him the welcome he deserves.

We make no apology for again drawing our readers' attention to the campaign for a democratic Greater London Labour Party. The outcome will directly concern party members throughout the country.

Firstly, how the basic issue - central bureaucracy vs regional democracy - is resolved in London is likely to determine the future pattern of development of the Labour party in the rest of the country. If a rigid, centralist structure is imposed on the Party members in London after 44 years of relative autonomy - then it is unlikely that Scotland, Wales or the North East will achieve the independence they are now demanding.

We should remember, incidentally, that autonomy in London was not unsuccessful. The Party machine was able to capture and hold the L.C.C. for over thirty years DESPITE the Tory Government in Whitehall for most of this period and DESPITE the fall of the Labour Government in 1951. Labour lost power only in the 1967 election campaign organised from Transport House. Defeat then may have been inevitable, but many London activists feel that at least the Inner London Education Authority could have been held if the Campaign had been run under local control; Comprehensive education could thus have been saved for London.

Secondly, whatever solution is proposed this will have to be ratified by the National Conference of the Party. It is important, therefore, that affiliated organisations throughout the country should understand the issues involved so that they will be able to make the right decision.

Thirdly, the popular trend in national politics is towards regional devolution. Party organisation should move with the times rather than try to put the clock back.

HULL'S UNEMPLOYMENT CRISIS

--- COME TO THE EMERGENCY PUBLIC MEETING.

FRIDAY 16th FEBRUARY, BEVIN HOUSE, GEORGE STREET, at 7.30 P.M.

(ORGANISED BY THE HULL UNEMPLOYED WORKERS COMMITTEE)

speakers include:- K.McNamara MP

Mr A. Rooney

J.Johnson MP

Mr S.McCluskey NUS Secretary

Cmdr. H.Pursey MP

Mr C.Lancaster AUETW

Mr D.Shenton T & GWU Regional Secretary

Mr T.Waddington NUR Docks Branch Secretary

Mr W.Joester AEU District Secretary

Mr T.Topham

Mr R.Wade Hull Trades Council Secretary

For marxists it is axiomatic that the Government of any state is the "executive committee of the ruling class." In a capitalist state it acts in the interests of the capitalist class and, ipso facto, against the interests of the working class. That it does so does not depend on the goodwill or ill intentions of the Cabinet Ministers of the day. Unless they are prepared to introduce legislation which will completely replace the existing social system with one based on the social ownership and control of the means of production, distribution and exchange, all their actions will tend to bolster up the capitalist system.

This does not mean to say that some sections of the capitalist class will not suffer. The tendency of capitalism is for competition to lead to monopolies and this is graphically illustrated by the current fever of giant mergers in the electronic industry, in textiles and banking. Economic power becomes concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. The state, whether ruled by Labour or Tory Governments, gives its blessing to these ventures because the result is a streamlining and rationalisation which is essential if British capitalism is to meet the fierce competition of its rivals in the international scramble for markets.

Since Labour came to power there has been a steady rise in the number of millionaires. This during a period when a vicious wage freeze has been imposed on the working class; when factories have been closed or gone on short time; when hundreds of thousands have been thrown out of work. It can hardly be claimed that this makes any advance towards socialism.

But this is not all. The sector of the population which has gained most from Labour's three years in power has been the owners of Ordinary shares quoted upon the London Stock Exchange. The facts speak for themselves. The Financial Times Industrial Ordinary Share Index, published less than two weeks ago, rose to the highest figure in its history.

As the economic correspondent of the Sunday Telegraph points out, every £100 invested in these shares in 1964, just before Labour won the General Election, is now worth £116. Shares bought for £100 in the last three months of 1966 are now worth very nearly £140. He goes on to add, cynically, that these shareholders can face the future with a reasonably warm glow, despite Mr. Jenkins' promises of two years hard slog.

These figures only refer to the average parcel of shares. Some did very much better. G.E.C. shares which stood at 44s last year have now risen to 93s9d (A.E.I. workers at Woolwich, please note!) Martins Bank rose from 16s to 28s 6d. By contrast, during the last three-and-a-quarter years of Tory rule, the stock market on balance did not rise at all. This is indeed astonishing. A stagnating stock market under a Tory Government and a boom under Harold Wilson, despite the fact that the economy as a whole is stagnant. There is a lesson here which all members of the Labour Party should ponder.

In whose interest is Labour ruling? Is this what we voted for in 1964 and 1966 - bigger profits for stock exchange speculators and high unemployment and closed factories for the workers? Perhaps Dick Crossman will be able to tell us that this is what he means by socialism!

"AN INTRODUCTION TO MARXIST ECONOMIC THEORY" - a critical review

Ernest Mandel's book, "An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory", is a straightforward literal exposition of Das Kapital, except for the third section which attempts to explain why the history of post-war capitalism fails to vindicate the "recurrent-crises" theory. Though a clear explanation as far as it goes, this literal approach seems mistaken; for the Marxist economist owes loyalty not to Marx (still less to the text of Kapital, two-thirds of which was unfinished at his death) but to economic theories which are useful to Marxists.

Mandel gives the enquirer no insight into why so many Marxist economists (of which Joan Robinson, Sweezy and Baran are well-known examples) go by no means all the way with Marxist economics. Nor does the book attempt to explain why the idea that the increasing organic composition of capital eventually causes a slump, was ignored by economists until Keynes produced a remarkably similar theory forty years later. In fact, Keynes, rather surprisingly, is not mentioned at all.

The enquirer into Marxist economic theory does not just want to know what Marx said - if he has some guide as to which they are (such as Freedman's Pelican, "Marx on Economics") he can read the most important bits of Kapital in not very much more time than it takes to read the first two sections of Mandel's book. What the reader also needs is a clarification of the major ideas of bourgeois economics - of which the most important for this purpose are the supply-and-demand theory of price determination, the theory of the joint productive role of land, labour and capital, Keynes' analysis of the 1930's slump, and the bourgeois explanation of why capitalists continually substitute machinery for labour. It would be an insult to the non-economist to suggest that he does not know something about these things from common sense and common knowledge. But it may not occur to him to put them in the unfamiliar setting of an economist's "model" where things happen only under restricted assumptions, the nature of which affects the application of the model to reality and to further steps in the formation of economic theory. And it is necessary to compare bourgeois models with Marx's models in order to understand the criticisms of Marx's economics made by Bernstein, Joan Robinson, Croce and Pareto - to mention but a few.

Most of these criticisms concern the validity of the labour theory of value. The crux of the matter is; we all know that prices fluctuate with supply and demand, yet Marx says the price of an article is determined by the amount of labour put into it. Are these ideas compatible? Obviously they are, if Marx's model assumes supply and demand constant - that is, if he is just trying to explain why a fur coat costs around £100 and a woollen one around £15, instead of any other prices you care to think of. But when we have erected upon this model the concept of surplus value and all that follows from it - i.e. the whole of Marx's economic theory, does it or does it not matter that the basis of the analysis leaves out the forces which make prices fluctuate? If the labour theory of value falls, does Marx's economics fall? And Marx's sociology with it?

An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory ... continued

Supply and demand are generally neglected in Kapital, and this throws doubt not only, as Bernstein argued, upon the validity of the labour theory of value, but upon the theory of the falling rate of profit - capitalists increase the organic composition of their capital because they think they will make money out of it (this is common sense); why then do their expectations prove false? Something must happen to prices; Marx leaves a gap between this point and the "increasing-misery" theory; Keynes does not. Marxists must use bourgeois economics where it fills in such gaps; Marx, after all (quite apart from the fact that his work was unfinished) belonged to an age of under-developed economic science. Mandel, by sticking so much to what Marx said, has lost the opportunity to produce a badly needed short "lay" version of how this can be done; and he has failed to provide any reply to several of the criticisms of Marx's theory which his readers are likely to have met long before they came to the theory itself.

The third section of the book is considerably better; but in its analysis of what has provided capitalism with markets since the slump, the fact of increased living standards for the working class, and the most important question of whether these are due to trade unions' efforts, is ignored.

by ANNE COSTELLO

SECRET TRIAL FOR POLISH WRITER

based on New York Times report

A Warsaw judge, on February 12, over-ruled defence pleas and ordered a closed-door trial for the author of an operetta, alleged to satirize such prominent Poles as Mr. Gomulka, the Communist Party leader, and Cardinal Wyszynski, the Roman Catholic Primate. Janusz Szpotanski, 34-year-old author of the operetta, accused Judge Smaga of ordering prison officials to take back five books which were provided for him last week to help in preparing his defence. In spite of a court order allowing him a week to read the five books, prison officials tried to take them after four days, he said. He refused, but next day they were seized by court order.

After an hour's adjournment, the judge returned with the books and admitted he had ordered them to be returned "to acquaint the court with their contents". He rejected defence requests for a three-day adjournment to allow Mr. Szpotanski to finish his reading, and said he could read them in prison or between trial sessions. The judge ordered closed-door proceedings because matters "harmful to good morals" might be raised.

Censors in Warsaw have banned a pre-war avant-garde play at the Narodowy Theatre, which was forced recently to end performances of a classic work by the nineteenth-century poet, Adam Mickiewicz, informed sources have disclosed. The play is Gyubal Wahazar, by the late Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz, sometimes referred to as one of Ionesco's predecessors in the theatre of the absurd.

Backing Britain

There are more than 7 000 workers on the dole in the Hull area alone. The highest unemployment figures since before the war. Those office girls in London would have a hard time explaining to the lads who can't get a job at all what the 'I'm Backing Britain' campaign is all about... but if you live, work or draw the dole in Hull you pay for being British in three ways:-

- 1) Wages in the area are among the very lowest in the country.
- 2) Because unemployment has always been above the national average.
- 3) This means the bosses always find it easier to pay low wage rates, as in the engineering trades.

And when you get thrown out of work you suffer again, through the wage stop. The wage stop means benefits stopped at the minimum wages of the district. And you can't keep a family on that! The problem isn't that benefits are too high in Hull - it's that wages are too low. The Ministry of Social Security says in its handout 'That it would be "unfair" to give unemployed men sufficient to live on' since similar help cannot be given to the lower paid workers. Don't be fooled that argument helps to keep wage rates down. So refuse to take any job at less than trade union rates.

It doesn't stop there

Since 1951 the number of jobs in Hull has increased by 31 872 - 18 761 for women and 13 111 for men. There are always adverts for women workers at rates of pay at 4s per hour and less. The womenfolk are being driven out to work at cheap labour rates because they can't live on the low wages or the dole money that the men can bring home. If you are out of a job - and your wife goes out for next to nothing - as a family you are worse off:

Equal pay for women - Stop the double exploitation
This means trade union action
Unemployed workers, get organised.

If you are unemployed help yourself by joining or helping the Unemployed Workers Committee. What is it? A group of responsible lads who are willing to take up cases of delayed benefits, earnings related or other supplements or offer advice on these or other matters relating to unemployment. They have already taken up literally dozens of such cases and won them. But there must be scores of cases which they don't know about. If you've got a problem take it to the Committee.

Where is it? Every Thursday and Friday: 12 noon to 1.30 p.m. Blue Bell Inn, Lowgate (round the corner from the Exchange) and every Thursday evening from 7 p.m. at the same address.

What else, First, the unemployment situation here is the worst since

* leaflet issued by: Hull Unemployed Workers' Committee, 6 Hardane, Orchard Park Estate, Hull. Telephone 41045.

1939 and not enough people are aware of the fact. Second, we have to put the blame for this where it belongs - and it belongs with the Government and the employers - they put the pound before the people - we pay for their balance of payments problems. The unemployed are the front line victims of a deliberate policy - that also includes wage freeze (look at the Busmen), price rises (look in any retail shop) and increasing rents from interest rates.

Here: 1 000 sacked by Hawker Siddley; 300 more due for the hammer from American owned Imperial Typewriters; and hundreds of buildingworkers laid off in the area this winter. Harold Wilson said it would be 'a long hard winter'. He wants to join the dole queue and try it!

What you can do: 1) Know your rights at the Labour Exchange and demand them; 2) Join the Committee and help the fight and the publicity - there is more than enough to do - help yourself by helping them; 3) Go to your Union branch and raise hell about unemployment; 4) Get hold of your local councillor and demand some action on unemployment; 5) Tackle your MP. They want votes - we want work; 6) Involve your friends who are working - make sure they know what is happening to 6 000 families here; 7) Advertise and come to the public meeting on 16 February. (see elsewhere in this issue for details)

GULF TIGHTENS GRIP ON PORTUGAL

from Julian Atkinson

The director of the big American company, Gulf Oil Corporation, met in Lisbon recently. Gulf Oil works in Angola and Mozambique through its subsidiaries, Cabinda Gulf Oil and Mozambique Gulf Oil. The chairman, Mr. E. D. Brockett, met Salazar and the 'President' of the Republic. The Overseas and Finance Ministers were also at the meeting with some other members of the Portuguese Government. These personal contacts between the Gulf Oil Chairman and key figures of the dictatorship, indicate the importance attached by Gulf Oil to the oil resources of the two major Portuguese colonies.

Because of growing instability in the Middle East, the oil consortiums are looking for other sources of supply, and governments, like Salazar's, which are docile to their interests, and will enable them to gain control of these new oil fields.

Without giving details, Mr. Brockett made the point at his press conference that good results had been attained in Angola and Mozambique. The Review 'Marches Tropicaux et Mediterraneens' believes that Cabinda (Angola) resources are of the same as Nigeria's (Vida Mundial, Lisbon 18.8.67).

Gulf Oil Corporation had a total net profit of nearly \$300 million US for the first six months of 1967. Prices of petrol and fuel oil have recently been raised in Portugal, because, it is said, of the closure of the Suez Canal.

TWO MYTON'S MILITANTS VICTIMISED

from a building correspondent

Mr. Lou Lewis, leader of the year-long dispute on Myton's Barbican site, has been dismissed by Kirk & Kirk from its Grosvenor Sq. site after being employed for only a few hours. The firm claims that it had found it had too many carpenters and dismissed 3, including Mr. Lewis. Men on the site banned overtime. Another of the former Barbican leaders, Mr. Rolf Langdon, has been dismissed by Westerby Shuttering from a site in Tower Hamlets. He had been complaining about safety precautions.

WOOLWICH TRADES COUNCIL SPEAKS OUT ON REDUNDANCY

from Will Fancy

The following leaflet was issued by Woolwich Trade Council, 2000 copies of which were distributed on the march by AEI workers in Woolwich:

'Woolwich has lost 16 000 jobs in the last two years! There are 1 335 on the Labour Exchange (which covers only part of the area) and only 273 vacancies!

Why does this happen? Throughout the massive £300 million GEC/AEI group, thousands of workers are being sacked in the interests of 'increased efficiency'. In the last five years, profits of General Electric have rocketed from £4 million to more than £17 million. But even that is not enough for them. AEI used to make £145 profit for every worker. But the more ruthless GEC can squeeze £319 profit from each of its employees. 'Even in our most successful businesses,' GEC's chairman, Lord Aldington told shareholders last year, 'there has to be a constant struggle to cut costs and increase efficiency.' The struggle is a comfortable one for the GEC directors who collect a total of £110 000 basic salary, and, no doubt, are offered a lucrative 'golden handshake' when their services are no longer required. In the GEC group, like so many other businesses, it is the workers who are forced to make the sacrifices to increase profitability: and GEC's profits were 22% up at £9 million in only six months last year (Guardian 14/12/67). Some people have said that if AEI had remained independent, redundancies would have been avoided. This is not so. Even before the merger, AEI were pruning their work force and plans for major redundancies were being prepared before GEC took over.

Only the shareholders benefit from mergers. In the last two months, GEC shares have climbed 10s and are nearing £5 each. Not bad for just holding a piece of paper, eh? A few people do very well out of you - here are the amounts that three men personally own in GEC: David Lewis: £22 000 000; Kenneth Bond: £19 000 000; Arnold Weinstock: £4 700 000. And what does the Government do? Its Industrial Reorganisation Corporation facilitated the merger. And unemployment follows. So then the Government has to pay unemployment benefits because it did not get guarantees of 'no redundancy'. Meanwhile it gives 'help' to companies: GEC can expect £400 000 from the Selective Employment Tax in development areas.

No-one can object to relieving the distress in the depressed areas. But what's the point of shifting unemployment around the country? This policy does not create new jobs in the country: and that's what we need. It just spreads the burden a bit wider. If Government policy produces mergers and monopolies, then the Government must take responsibility for the results. What can we do? We must fight for the following demands:

- 1) No redundancy for the sake of profitability; 2) Cure unemployment by producing for need and not for profit. And we've plenty of needs that the 'excess capacity' could be put to work on; 3) Consultation with the workers before the mergers, which should not go through without firm written guarantees; 4) Keep the plant open - the Government is the main buyer of telecommunications equipment: let it ensure production is maintained.

5) Link up with other GEC plants. Our redundancy in Woolwich is only the second (Harlow was first). It will be the turn of other plants next. Nobody is immune. Our stewards and union officials must seek sympathy action - strike action - to force the company to treat us properly. They won't do it if we ask them - only if we make them. Workers can only rely on their own organisations. Just as the bosses combine through take-overs, so workers must link up to fight the effects of mergers; 6) Workers' control. Nationalise the industry under workers' control. We produce the wealth, why shouldn't we control what we produce?"

RADICALISING RADICAL STUDENTS

from Bob Turpin

The Radical Student Alliance is dead. Long live the RSA. In other words, a serious and commendable attempt is being made to resuscitate what was, at its inception, a worthy effort to 'pressurise' the NUS into being more representative of British students. But Auntie NUS just wouldn't be pressurised. The RSA, apart from the famous LSE dispute failed to make any impact. It had fallen victim to the apathy it had been formed to fight and destroy. Possibly one of the reasons why it never got off its feet was that it concentrated, or at any rate seemed to concentrate, its efforts in the London area alone. An effort now, however, is being made to remedy this.

At the recent National Council meeting of the RSA it was decided to re-organise the Alliance into eight regions. And accordingly, the first regional convention was held in London last weekend (10th and 11th Feb). The convention deplored the relinquishing of the Grants campaign by the NUS and determined to organise the campaign in its place. It decided to support the lobby called by the art colleges for the 28 February and to hold a mass lobby and demonstration on 1 May.

The most surprising thing about the convention was the revolutionary nature of its theme. The other subjects on the agenda were the guerilla struggle in Southern Africa, solidarity with the Vietnamese people against US imperialist aggression and student power. It seemed as if the leaders of the RSA had suddenly realised not only the true nature of the student in society, but of society itself, and that students are an oppressed section of the community. In short, the RSA has had a political awakening.

As a result of this the RSA has now pledged to support the Solidarity Demonstration of 17 March and the Berlin International Demonstration this coming weekend (17 and 18 February) to which it is sending a delegation. A day of activity for Vietnam will take place on 21 February. Photographic displays and exhibitions on Vietnam will take place in several universities and colleges. After an enlightening talk by a representative of the African National Congress, the convention declared its support for the guerilla fighters of Southern Africa and to express solidarity in a variety of ways wherever and whenever relevant. This change of line of the RSA is certainly encouraging, but reflects a general movement towards a solidarity position regarding the struggle of the Third World against imperialism.

An examination of the Inland Revenue's report for the year ended March 31, 1967, reveals many interesting trends. The figures cover the tax year 1965-66, in that period the number of people with a total annual income of £100,000 or more (the official definition of a millionaire) rose from 131 to 170. These "millionaires" had a total income of £25,500,000 between them, an average of well over £150,000. They paid £13,500,000 in surtax. Sharp rises took place in the numbers of those in other higher income brackets, too. Those with between £75,000 and £100,000 increased from 130 to 161, and the number between £50,000 and £75,000 rose even more steeply, from 381 to 519.

In fact, increases took place in every income bracket over £2,500 but the number with between £2,000 and £2,500, fell 24,500 to 22,500. The total number of incomes over £2,000 was up from 347,000 to 384,000. It must be stressed, however, that these figures should be treated with caution. It is precisely the people with most money who can afford to employ accountants to take full advantage of loopholes in tax law (to put it mildly). Having made this qualification the trend is interesting.

Another trend revealed was that investment income rose as compared to earned income as a source of money for those in the surtax bracket. In 1965-66 it was higher than earned income for the first time in 10 years. The breakdown in the past three periods has been: 1963-64 earned £927m.; unearned £836m.; 1964-65 earned £1,055m.; unearned £977m.; 1965-66 earned £1,162m.; unearned £1,198m. Of the millionaires, only two out of 151 people with assessed income of £100,000 (assessed and total income are different) had no money coming in from investments.

These figures certainly back up the demands for a wealth tax which some sections of the movement are putting forward.

LAST YEAR'S TRADE THE WORST SINCE 1951 from an economics correspondent

This month's Board of Trade Journal has an article analysing the trade figures for 1967. The results are not very encouraging: the United Kingdom's trade deficit was up to £561m., the worst result since 1951. It was well over double the 1966 deficit of £233m. Exports were down £21m to £5,026m., while imports went up by £495m., or 8 per cent., to £6,442m. This trend was most marked in the fourth quarter, when the visible deficit amounted to £337m., nearly 50 per cent. more than in the whole of 1966. The journal blames a number of factors for this position: after a promising start, exports were soon affected by the noticeable slackening in the growth of world trade in manufactures which over the previous three years had been rising strongly.

The Middle East war in June reduced exports to that area and beyond, and the journal makes the usual charge that the docks' strikes affected exports more than imports. Imports last year were given a head start by the removal of the import surcharge in November, 1966. Arrivals of fuel and of food, drink and tobacco were markedly higher in the first half of 1967. A large rise in landed oil prices in the wake of the closure of the Suez Canal added to the import bill.

The report shows how clearly the performance of the British economy is tied to world trade trends. Until Britain has a policy of helping the under-developed countries there will be no big increase in exports.

The Financial Times of February 8th contained a report by its labour reporter, John Elliott, on the latest position in the busmen's pay rise affair. It is worth quoting extensively:

"TGWU national leaders are expected to tell their regional officers not to press ahead with legal actions to gain the £1 a week rise for 77,000 municipal busmen stopped by the Government under its Prices and Incomes Act powers. Mr. Frank Cousins, TGWU general secretary, announced that the rises were to be fought for in the courts instead of by strike action after Mr. Ray Gunter, Minister of Labour, had made it clear that the rise was totally unacceptable under the incomes policy. Actions have been started against many of the 97 municipal corporations involved. But the Government has remained confident that the wording of the relevant section ...of the act, and of the notice stopping the pay rise while it is studied by the Prices and Incomes Board, cannot be faulted in the courts.....The TGWU legal department and its advisors have been examining the position since the Government stopped payment nearly two weeks ago and the national leadership now seems to have had second thoughts about its chances of winning any action....."

This report, if true, indicates a most deplorable state of affairs. Many sections of the busmen, notably from Scotland and Nottingham, were eager for militant action. Had the leadership of the union come out for strike action of one kind or another an overwhelming majority of the busmen would have supported them. Unfortunately the action of the TGWU leadership - not to forget certain exceptions, e.g., Bill Jones, whose record on the TUC is most commendable - has been to damp down militant action. One has only to compare the docks' struggle with that of the busmen's to see that it is possible to fight and defeat the Government if there is militancy and a minimum level of leadership.

Everyone on the left has been pleased by the opposition to the Government's wages' policy which has emanated from the TGWU leadership. However, unless this opposition is consistent and goes forward the very "leftness" of the TGWU leadership could become a factor dampening down struggle. Militant trade unionists would not accept from right wing trade union leaders what the busmen accepted from Frank Cousins and Co. Those of us who have supported the initiatives of the TGWU leadership in the past have a special responsibility to do all we can to ensure that that leadership evolves to the left.

HOTEL RECOGNITION STRUGGLE HOTS UP

from a special correspondent

The struggle in the Torquay area to force hotels to recognise trade union negotiating rights has hotted up. Late last week the TGWU succeeded in cutting off supplies of heating oil to the hotels with which it is in dispute. The hotels have retaliated by arranging for the Gas Board to pipe gas to the Torbay Hotel (the place where the dispute started). A very bad role is being played by the General and Municipal Workers' Union, which is recognised by the Torquay Hotels Association. This union has been publicly denouncing the strike of the TGWU members. The G & M organises the gas workers who are installing the pipes. Meanwhile a propaganda war is being waged by the two sides. In a statement issued on February 12, Mr. Bert Ray of the TGWU disclosed that 10 hotels had agreed to hold talks with the union. This has been denied by the chairman of the Torquay Hotels Association. Many local union members expect the TGWU to try to persuade the Government to stop the strike-breaking action of the Gas Board.

THE MURDER OF BEN TRE

from an Associated Press report (7/2/68)

This once placid delta city died today - flattened in a 50-hour onslaught of bombs, shells and napalm that drove out the Vietcong. It became necessary to destroy the city to save it. So said a U.S. major. But at least 500 of Ben Tre's 35, 000 civilians - possibly 1,000 - are dead. "We will never know for sure," said U.S. advisor Lieut.-Colonel James Dare. "Many families are buried permanently under the rubble." This provincial capital was one of 35 towns and cities attacked by the Vietcong in the upsurge of fighting last week.

The invaders had overrun most of the city and were rallying to knock out the last pockets of Government resistance when the barrage was ordered. A U.S. captain said: "We waited until we had no choice. We argued with our corps headquarters at Can Tho. They didn't like the idea but they were convinced when we explained that it was rockets and bombing, or the end of us." Armed helicopters made dozens of passes at the rambling market place in the city centre, smashing its walls and leaving the roof a mass of twisted metal.

Business houses became gaunt shells of blackened concrete. The radio station, from which the Vietcong began broadcasting, was levelled by U.S. fighters. Major Chester L. Brown directed the attacks from a tiny spotter plane. He said: "It is always (sic) a pity about the civilians. In the mass confusion of this kind of thing, the people don't know where the lines are, they don't know where to hide."

But he saved hundreds of civilians from possible death. Told to bring in an air strike on "1,000 Vietcong" fleeing from the city, he buzzed down low and saw scores of young children and women. "Some Vietcong may have been among them, but I wasn't going to bring napalm on them," he said.

Editorial note: We have published this despatch in full, and without changing the offending word Vietcong because we felt that this would make the item of more use to people wanting to use it. The very bits about saving civilians are a revelation in themselves. How many times has there not been a Chester L. Brown to stop a napalm attack on fleeing civilians? The whole article is as put out by the Associated Press correspondent Peter Arnett, even the headline.

NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT LEADERS SPEAK TO THE PRESS IN VIETNAM

Agence France Presse reported on February 7: "N.L.F. leaders, apparently safely installed in parts of Saigon and clearly enjoying popular support, have been meeting western, non-American visitors. 'You can clearly see that the people are with us', they said. Throughout the N.L.F. 'zone' A.L.F. soldiers in uniform move about normally, even relaxed. With only their side-arms, they were going freely from house to house. 'The front does not burn cities. Rather it is content to push back the attacks on its sectors', a spokesman said. 'We are committing no criminal acts. Now look at the destruction caused by our enemies in the cities', he added.

Editorial note: This report gives lie to much of the propaganda put out by the Americans and indicates the real reason for the B 52 bombing of the outskirts of Saigon.

FRANK ALLAUN WORRIED BY MERGER TENDENCY

from a special correspondent

According to press reports, Mr. Frank Allaun, a member of the N.E.C. of the Labour Party (in fact his election was one of the few bright spots at the Scarborough conference), is to suggest that Transport House research staff should inquire into the recent trend of increasing mergers. He wants them to examine what effects this tendency is having on the firms' employees and the possible effects on the country generally. He is reported as saying on February 11th:

"The spate is now becoming such a flood that in many industries control is virtually passing into the hands of one or two companies. Within those companies there are one or two individuals who have effective control. We are facing a choice now between a privately owned monopoly and publicly owned monopoly. And the deciding factor is not efficiency but democracy, because economic and indirectly, political, power is passing into the hands of a few people.

Transport House is already planning to hold a weekend conference of politicians, trade union officials and academics on the City in about two months' time. Originally planned to cover the institutions in the City, it is now almost certain that mergers will be brought on to the agenda in view of recent developments. However, any discussion has to be seen to a background of the fact that it is the Labour Government which has sponsored the organisation - the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation - which has acted as the midwife to many of the recent mergers.

EXPEL WILSON CALL

from an Essex reader

Members of Harlow Group A branch of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs called for the expulsion of Harold Wilson from their union at a meeting on February 9th. The men are particularly angry because of the Government's role in bringing about the G.E.C. take-over of A.E.I.. They say that Mr. Wilson's activities are "prejudicial to the interests of the trade union movement." Directly arising out of the take-over 200 laboratory workers in Woolwich are to be made redundant. There is also the whole question of the closing of part of an A.E.I. plant in Harlow weighing on the men's minds.

AN INSTANCE OF "BACK BRITAIN" BLUNDERING BACKWARD

A West Middlesex reader reports: Hallmark Cards Ltd., of Northolt, is a small, U.S.-owned firm which is notoriously anti-union and makes its employees sign a statement that they are not union members, communists, active members of the Labour Party, etc., before they may sign on for a job. This notorious scab shop is obviously a contender for the "Back Britain" campaign. It has stubbornly resisted attempts by both SOGAT and the TGWU to organise it and, last week, the management decided to give each worker a paper union jack to help the campaign, and perhaps take their minds off the unions' attempts to organise the place. However, the first flags printed at Hallmarks were messed up. The "blue" did not come out at all and the "red" soaked through the paper so they were giving their workers red flags instead of union jacks!!

After these were withdrawn a new batch was printed and the slogan "I'm backing Hallmarks" put on them. However, someone then noticed that the union jack was upside down, once again they were withdrawn and the firm's management called the whole farce off.

Will you help start a 'LONDON VOICE'?

All Labour Party members will agree that our views are misrepresented in the National Press. In particular London is ill served in this respect as, almost without exception, its local press is unsympathetic to the Labour viewpoint.

For this reason a group of Labour Party members, trade unionists and co-operators are asking for your support in the launching of a London edition of "Labour's Voice." The provisional aims of the paper are as follows:

1. Return of the G.L.C. to Labour control.
2. A democratic Greater London Labour Party.
3. Democratic control of public services: Transport, Housing, Hospitals, Police, Education, etc.
4. Abolition of the City of London.
5. Comprehensive education throughout Greater London.
6. Maintenance of a Socialist Labour Government.

Active trade unionists, co-operators and constituency workers in the Greater London area are invited to join (in their personal capacities) a list of sponsors of "London Voice". (Sponsors will support the principle of a London Labour paper without, necessarily, being committed to all the views and opinions expressed).

Organisations are invited to enrol as "supporters" of "London Voice" by (a) placing a regular monthly order for the paper; (b) sending delegates to the paper's launching assembly and periodic delegate conferences to follow; (c) by nominating individuals for the list of sponsors; (d) by sending a donation to the Fighting Fund; (e) by placing an advertisement—particularly for May Day.

A working party, with Syd Bidwell, M.P., as chairman and Ken Graham of U.S.D.A.W. as secretary, is now preparing for the delegate assembly which will launch the new paper towards the end of March.

PROVISIONAL SPONSORS*

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Please accept order for copies of "London Voice" per month. £ : : enclosed.

My organisation would/not* like to enrol as a supporter of "London Voice".

A donation of £ : : is enclosed for "London Voice" Fighting Fund.

The following are appointed as delegates to attend the founding Assembly (Names and addresses please)

We should like to nominate the following as sponsor(s)

Please insert a May Day advertisement in "London Voice", size copy attached.

Signed Organisation

Please return this form to: Ken Graham, 79 Thrale Road, London, S.W.16.